



By LCdr. K. C. Jones

Day three in theater, and what better way to break in my fresh new credit card than on an Osan RON (remain overnight). A four-year supply of sneakers and new luggage tags for the kids were on the list.

Osan hovered around one-half-mile visibility, in a thick summer haze and an obscured ceiling. I was in the left seat, flying with a copilot new to WestPac but who quickly was learning how to interpret the local controller's instructions. We took the time to brief inside-outside scan and callouts. We also reviewed the missed approach for the second time, just in case we didn't see the field. While being vectored onto the ILS final-approach course, the visibility was reported to be "one mile in haze." We were cleared to land by approach about five miles out, and we made sure our checklists were complete.

At one mile from the runway and about 400 feet, the approach lights came in sight, and soon the runway threshold was in view. As the copilot started to call out radar altitudes, the crew chief and I looked down the runway. We saw a dark object in the haze, well down the runway; it looked like a dark rectangular piece of asphalt pavement on an otherwise concrete runway. At 20 feet from touchdown, that "pavement" moved, as the rectangle rotated 90 degrees.

The crew chief and I barked out, "That's a truck on the runway!" as I rapidly brought up the power to initiate a go-around.

Just as the truck started to disappear under our nose, the two doors to the cab opened, and two people

got out to inspect the arresting gear, which was located near the 3 board of runway 27.

We cleaned up and reported our go-around to approach control. They were unaware a truck was on the runway. We got vectors to another approach and landed.

A few calls of assurance that the "runway is clear" certainly put the previous approach in historical perspective.

After shutting down for the night, we had a prolonged discussion with Osan airfield management that revealed several additional factors to our runway incursion. Osan was conducting a base exercise, and most personnel were in various levels of MOPP (mission-oriented-protective posture) gear on a hot day. The arresting gear was getting inspected after a heavy-aircraft takeoff, which we understood to be standard Air Force procedure.

During the past decade, there have been many advances in avionics systems in transport aircraft: TCAS (traffic-collision-avoidance system) and EGPWS (enhanced-ground-proximity-warning system), nevertheless, perhaps no greater warning system is better than a set of eyeballs looking outside the aircraft, particularly around the terminal environment. Our crew was waved off successfully when in close because we had briefed and executed our divided inside-outside responsibilities in accordance with our SOP. Preparing for a missed approach every time as preached in flight school is another lesson we revisited. The best defense for our runway incursion was a good offense. After all, TCAS does not mean "truck-collision-avoidance system." 🛩

LCdr. Jones flies with VR-61.